



# PILEATED DRUMMING

*Dubuque Audubon Society*

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## RESIDENT'S CORNER

By Wayne Buchholtz

**P**Dubuque Audubon Society is going into another year – another year of great programs and field trips. Throughout the newsletter you will find information on upcoming events that Audubon will hold. Field trips will take you to areas close to home where you will be guaranteed to see birds. Each field trip is planned to maximize your experience. The programs are held at the E. B. Lyons Interpretive Center and provide excellent information about nature in various regards. They are not always about birds, but neither is nature. When you go on a field trip, chances are you will see more than birds. So you may find that a program will be about frogs, or badger or a trip to a fascinating place. I encourage you to attend our programs and to schedule time for a field trip. You will meet others that have interests the same as yours. And, as I keep telling people that ask, you do not need to be an expert. We are here to help you and who knows – one day you will be teaching someone else.

We just held the Annual Dubuque Bald Eagle Watch. I was afraid it was going to be postponed. The student programs on Friday were cancelled because of bad weather. Each year we offer free raptor programs to any fifth grade class that would like to attend. Mention this to your student if he is going to be in 5<sup>th</sup> grade next year. We normally have about 800 students attend. It was a real bummer that we had to cancel. Saturday turned out great and we had a good crowd. I am estimating about 2000 people attended the programs on raptors, bobcats and lynx. Everyone I visited with had a great time. This year there were some 50 eagles at the lock and dam. Take time to make your own field trip and venture down to the lock and watch as the eagles fish.

Remember to attend one of our next programs or field trips. Bring your family, a buddy, parent, or neighbor and spend time with other birders. I have to go. I just took a phone call that a Snowy Owl was seen at the canoe launch at the Mines of Spain. I hope it is still there. It is always a good sighting this time of year.

Until next time, happy birding.

## **GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

By Joe Tollari

The 2012 Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will take place Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20, 2012. This is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent. In 2011, 92,218 checklists were submitted. (I submitted 5 of those.) This represented 594 species reported and included 11,471,949 individual birds counted. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. Follow the three simple steps to participate.

(1) Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count. You can count for longer if you wish. You can count birds in your own backyard, at the bird observation rooms at one of the nature centers, or on a hike through a park or woods. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day if you count in other locations on that day.

(2) Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time.

(3) When you are finished, enter your results through the GBBC web site

([www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/)). You will see a button marked "Enter Your Checklists!" on that website on the first day of the count.

Go to that same website now for more information and checklists. The website is easy to use and full of information. I suggest downloading one of the PowerPoint documents which lead you through the process. While you are at the website, check out the winners of last year's photo contest.

I plan on participating again this year (my fourth year). I will observe at my own feeders and will also go out to Swiss Valley Nature Center and E.B. Lyons Interpretive Center to count in their bird observation rooms.

## **INVASION OF THE SNOWY OWL**

From **The Observer**, Newsletter of the IDNR Wildlife Diversity Program

Almost melting into the winter landscape, white figures perch on fence posts and bare spots of

earth; snowy owls have returned to pass the season in Iowa, and they have returned in force. December saw a flurry of reports as bird watchers noticed the increase. Reports of snowy owls have been coming from across the state; from Sioux City to Mason City to Iowa City. Over 100 "snowies" have already been reported, topping the 2010-2011 total count of 19.

As temperatures and prey numbers fall, snowy owls leave their nesting grounds in the Arctic for relatively balmy climates in Canada and the U.S. Iowans see an increase in snowies every four years or so when owls outnumber their top prey item, lemmings, and disperse farther in a desperate search for food. It appears that 2011 was one of those years.

Unlike most owls, snowies hunt during the day and give bird watchers a good opportunity to see them in action. Besides lemmings, other small mammals, as well as fish and birds make up their menu. Being a tundra bird, snowies can often be spotted sitting on the ground in a grassy pasture. They will also perch on trees and poles. Your best chance of seeing these white owls will be from December through February, but they've been seen in Iowa as early as October and late as March.

Listen for calls of many owl species to escalate in February, also dubbed the month of the Owl Moon. All nine species of Iowa's owls are present during this time, since many snowies have not yet returned to their nesting rounds. If you use this winter as an opportunity to become more familiar with our northern visitors, don't be surprised if other owls, hawks and eagles also make an appearance.

Keep up with owl sightings and all other birds by joining the Iowa Bird Listserve at [www.iowabirds.org](http://www.iowabirds.org).



# **D**UBUQUE AUDUBON SOCIETY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**February, 2012**

<b>Feb.9 – Thurs.</b>	<b>DUB. AUDUBON PROGRAM: AMPHIBIAN CONSERVATION THROUGH FROG WATCH USA</b>	<b>EB Lyons Interpretive Center, 8991 Bellevue Hts, Dubuque, IA 5:30 pm – Dubuque Audubon Society Board Meeting 7:00 pm – Program: Jared McGovern will present a program entitled “Amphibian Conservation through Frog Watch USA” Jared is the Science Education Coordinator at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium.</b>
<b>Feb. 11 – Sat.</b>	<b>OWL PROWL</b>	<b>Hurstville Interpretive Center, 18670 63<sup>rd</sup>. St, Maquoketa, IA 52060 6:00 pm - Join a naturalist to learn more about owls in Iowa and their excellent adaptations. Then we’ll head to Maquoketa Caves where Bob Walton will lead us in calling the owls. Dress for the weather. All ages welcome!</b>
<b>Feb. 17–20, 2012</b>	<b>Great Backyard Bird Count</b>	<b>See article in this newsletter about the Great Backyard Bird Count. Visit <a href="http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/">www.birdsource.org/gbbc/</a> for additional information.</b>
<b>Feb. 20 – Mon.</b>	<b>ICE FISHING FUN</b>	<b>10:00 am at Mud Lake Park This is a non-school day! Bring the kids to Mud Lake to learn how to fish...on ice! We have a limited amount of equipment to loan out, please call to reserve a spot today, 563.556.6745</b>
<b>Feb. 24 – Fri.</b>	<b>OWL PROWL</b>	<b>EB Lyons Interpretive Center, 8991 Bellevue Hts, Dubuque, IA 6:30 pm – Jared McGovern, Science Education Coordinator at the National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium, will first speak on the biology of owls then lead a hike out to call in some owls</b>
<b>Feb. 26 – Sun.</b>	<b>FOREST GLIDERS</b>	<b>EB Lyons Interpretive Center, 8991 Bellevue Hts, Dubuque, IA 1:00 PM - Gerald Zuercher will present “Forest Gliders – A Glimpse into the World of Flying Squirrels.” University of Dubuque scientists have been studying a population of Southern Flying Squirrels found at the Mines of Spain. Come and hear what they have learned about this unique member of the squirrel family.</b>

## EAGLE DATA

From **The Observer**, Newsletter of the IDNR Wildlife Diversity Program

Since Bald Eagles first returned to Iowa in the late 70s', their numbers have been steadily rising. In 2011, reports were received on 290 territories, 50 of which were first-time reports. The majority (73%) of these nests were reported as active. Ninety-one counties in Iowa now have eagle nests, with Grundy, Pocahontas, and Wright counties reporting for the first time. For comparison, 265 territories were reported in 2010, with 47 of those territories reported on for the first time.

Not all territories came with data on young or the success of fledglings. However, we do know that 76 territories produced a total of 116 young. If we extrapolate this data, it's estimated that 306 young eagles were produced in Iowa last year. That's up from an estimated 253 hatched in 2010.

A new aspect of this year's survey was an aerial survey for eagle nests. Volunteers from within the DNR scanned the trees for nests from small planes last spring before leaf-out. Over 1700 miles of potential eagle habitat was flown. Only five unknown nests and five previously-observed nests were detected. By comparison, ground surveys over the same area had detected thirteen nests. The 2011 flights were a test to see if this type of survey would be useful in Iowa. A low nest-detection rate, however, indicated that the Iowa landscape is not ideal for an aerial survey. Ground surveys, such as those performed by our volunteers, are more cost-effective and produce better data. It is likely that we will discontinue the aerial surveys next year.

Our goal in 2012 is to have a higher percentage of sentinel nests monitored. These sentinel nests should be monitored every year, so we can watch for changes in Iowa's eagle population. In 2011, however, only 81 of the 135 sentinel nests were assigned to a volunteer for monitoring. However, we received data on only 69 of those nests, which represents just 20% of active territories in Iowa. In 2012, we hope to receive data on all our monitored nests, as well as find volunteers to monitor unassigned territories.

Volunteers also made observation on hawk and owl nests. Ten red-tailed hawk nests were reported from six counties, which is definitely the tip of the iceberg for Iowa's most common hawk. Only four of these

nests had data on young produced; these nests hatched 6 young. In addition to red-tails nests, six great-horned owl, two peregrine falcon, two osprey and one short-eared owl nests were reported. We're very glad to see volunteers get more interested in monitoring Iowa's "other" raptors. While bald eagles are a magnificent bird, hawks and owls suffer from the same pressures of pollution, habitat loss and disturbance.

## THE CHICKADEE CHECK-OFF

From **The Observer**, Newsletter of the IDNR Wildlife Diversity Program

The Chickadee Check-Off has a new spokes-person this year—the grey tree frog. The spokes-frog has been chosen to represent his species and all other animals in Iowa supported by the Wildlife Diversity Program. The Chickadee Check-Off was created in 1981 as a way to get more funding for the Wildlife Diversity Program. Donations from this check-off have fallen 68% over the past two decades to hover around \$112,000 per year. You can support this critical funding source by checking line 58a on your Iowa tax form. Any amount donated can be written in and is deducted from your refund. The check-off funds projects such as peregrine falcon reintroduction, prairie chicken conservation, and the volunteer wildlife monitoring program. Please spread the word about this important funding opportunity.



## OFFICERS & BOARD MEMBERS

If you have any questions or comments, please contact us!

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## COFFEE VOLUNTEER NEEDED

For the past several years, Dubuque Audubon Society has offered shade-grown Audubon Coffee for sale at our meetings, E.B. Lyons Interpretive Center and Swiss Valley Nature Center. This program was started by former Treasurer Jane Ward and picked up by Dave Fisher. Dave and Pat Fisher will soon be leaving the area. We hope to continue selling coffee, but that will depend on finding someone to take over Dave's duties. Currently, Dave orders coffee from National Audubon Society, maintains an inventory, prepares and serves coffee at monthly Dubuque Audubon meetings and delivers coffee to the two nature centers. If you are a coffee lover or would like to take on a volunteer job, contact Dave Fisher (556-5814) or Joe Tollari (583-2077).



## 2011 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

By Joe Tollari and Charlie Winterwood

The 2011 Christmas Bird Count was held on December 17, 2011 in the Dubuque area. Over twenty participants ranging in age from 10 to "in the 80's" searched over an area from Durango to the Airport and from East Dubuque to Centralia, counting all of the birds observed. A light coating of snow made for slippery roads early on, but conditions improved by 10:30 am. Numbers of woodland and open-field species were down, but water fowl numbers were up; the mild temperatures created a great deal of open water. We counted 8,582 birds in 56 species. In addition, a Fox Sparrow and an Iceland Gull were observed during the count week but not on the actual count day. Drat! The results of the CBC are listed below.

Canada Goose	239	Red-bellied Woodpecker	40
Trumpeter Swan	15	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1
Wood Duck	1	Downy Woodpecker	57
Am. Black Duck	2	Hairy Woodpecker	12
Mallard	721	Northern Flicker	3
Canvasback	4000	Pileated Woodpecker	10
Redhead	3	Northern Shrike	3
Ring-necked Duck	400	Blue Jay	86
Lesser Scaup	100	American Crow	248
Bufflehead	48	Blk-capped Chickadee	203
Com. Goldeneye	125	Tufted Titmouse	45
Hooded Merganser	15	Red-breasted Nuthatch	5
Com. Merganser	14	White-breasted Nuthatch	114
Ruddy Duck	1	Brown Creeper	5
Rg-nckd Pheasant	1	Eastern Bluebird	4
Wild Turkey	36	American Robin	2
Great Blue Heron	5	European Starling	613
Bald Eagle	79	Am. Tree Sparrow	84
Cooper's Hawk	1	Song Sparrow	8
Red-tailed Hawk	6	Swamp Sparrow	1
Rough-legged Hawk	2	White-throated Sparrow	9
American Kestrel	5	White-crowned Sparrow	1
American Coot	10	Dark-eyed Junco	326
Ring-billed Gull	93	Northern Cardinal	167
Herring Gull	1	Red-winged Blackbird	7
Rock Pigeon	196	House Finch	89
Mourning Dove	19	Pine Siskin	220
Belted Kingfisher	3	American Goldfinch	48



*Chickadee*  
Jerry Acton

# **SUMMARY OF CERULEAN WARBLER SURVEYS IN THE BIRD CONSERVATION AREA OF NORHTEAST IOWA IN 2011.**

By Jon Stravers

The objective of these bird surveys is to develop a better understanding of bird populations along the Mississippi River and other areas within the Bird Conservation Area of Northeast Iowa (BCA). With the results of this project, we aim to provide baseline information on bird populations nesting within specific study areas in the BCA; with special attention to the Species of Greatest Conservation Concern list (SGCC) and especially Cerulean Warblers.

This effort is part of an overall effort to assimilate and maintain bird data at a few specific locations within the Bird Conservation Area of Northeast Iowa in order to develop more consistent long-term data on bird populations. The work completed in 2011 is the 5<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of conducting bird surveys and the 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of Red-shouldered Hawk surveys in the Bird Conservation Area of Northeast Iowa.

The study areas for this project included 27 survey points within Yellow River State Forest, 24 points within Pool 10 of the Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and 49 points within Effigy Mounds National Monument. All of these study areas are located within the BCA (map was sent earlier).

We conducted ten minute point count surveys for birds at 100 points within the Bird Conservation Area of Northeast Iowa during the breeding season of 2011. Points within Yellow River State Forest and the Upper Mississippi River National Fish and Wildlife Refuge were visited three times during the breeding season; points within Effigy Mounds National Monument were visited once.

At each visit we recorded all birds seen and heard within a ten minute time period. We divided the ten minute time period into 3 time frames: the first 3 minutes, the middle 2 minutes, and the last 5 minutes. Observations were conducted between thirty minutes before sunrise and 10:30 a.m. The order of the stations visited was randomly mixed

or mixed by choosing a different starting point each visit. Observations were not conducted during inclement weather: including fog, steady drizzle, prolonged rain and wind > 20 km/h – (12 mph).

In addition to recording the species seen or heard, additional data was collected for every observation, including the estimated distance to the individual and the type of observation (visual or auditory). The observers recorded birds where they were first detected and in order to avoid double counting the same individual. Extra data that was collected included cloud cover, wind speed and start and end times.

Data collected in 2011 was compared to similar data collected at these same locations in previous years and also with data collected in various other locations within the BCA during 2011 and during the past five years.

A total of 78 species of birds were observed during this study, including 18 of the 30 species listed on the Species of Greatest Conservation Concern list for forest habitats in Iowa. Species diversity at the various points ranged from a high of 26 species on June 30 at Luster Heights point #6, along the forested slope near the confluence of Paint Creek and the Mississippi River, to a low of 10 species on June 15 at Yellow River Forest bird point # 5B along Donohue Road. The overall average number of species observed per point was 17.41.



*Red Shoulder Hawk*  
Bob Howdeshell

We observed species on the Species of Greatest Conservation Concern list at all but one of the points. The highest number of SGCC species observed was six species which occurred at Yellow River State Forest bird point #2 on May 12 at a point north of Paint Rock Road and at Yellow River State Forest bird point #13 along Fire Tower Road on May 23. The average number of SGCC observed per point was 2.57 per point. The only point where we found no species on the SGCC present was at Yellow River Forest bird point # 5B along Donahue Road.



*Cerulean Warbler*  
Lloyd Spitalnik

Cerulean Warblers were observed in Yellow River State Forest at 17 of the 27 points monitored, on 33 of the 65 visits. The three bird points located within the Paint Rock Unit consistently had the highest diversity of bird species and SGCC, as well as high concentrations of Cerulean Warblers. The forested slope in the Heffern Hill area also had a good concentration of Ceruleans.

#### **POOL 10 OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE & FISH REFUGE**

During our observations along the Mississippi River in 2011, we observed 74 different species of birds within the three study areas. Eleven of the thirty species listed on the Species of Greatest Conservation Concern list were observed.

In the Sny Magill Complex, we found an average of 20.3 species per visit and an average of 2.38 SGCC species per visit. We found Cerulean Warblers at seven of the eight points.

In the Catfish Slough Complex we found an average of 17.46 species per visit and an average of 1.25 SGCC species per visit. We found Cerulean Warblers at one of the eight points.

In the Wyalusing Complex we found an average of 17.6 species per visit, and an average of 1.6 SGCC species per visit. We found Ceruleans Warblers at three of the eight points.

#### **EFFIGY MOUNDS NATIONAL MONUMENT**

During similar investigations within Effigy Mounds National Monument, we found Cerulean Warblers at 24 of 49 points surveyed.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Funding for this project was provided for by the Natural Resources Section of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St Paul District, La Crescent office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service McGregor District, Yellow River State Forest of the Iowa DNR, National Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative and by private conservation donations from Audubon Chapters in the region.

Field work was conducted by Jon Stravers, Darwin Koenig and Kathy Carlyle.



*Iceland Gull*  
Lillian Stokes

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Society is to  
provide educational  
opportunities to  
the people of the  
tri-state area and  
to preserve the  
natural habitat of  
birds and other  
wildlife.

**DUBUQUE AUDUBON SOCIETY  
NEW MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Do NOT use this form to renew a membership in National Audubon Society. Use the form mailed to you by the National Audubon. There are two categories of memberships in the Dubuque Audubon Society

**CATEGORY A:** This category includes membership in National Audubon Society and the local chapter. You will receive 6 issues of Audubon Magazine and 9 issues of the local chapter newsletter, Pileated Drummings.

\_\_\_\_\_ National Audubon Society Free Membership **INTRODUCTORY ONLY**

**CATEGORY B:** This category of membership is local chapter only. You will receive 9 issues of the local chapter newsletter, Pileated Drummings. All funds will remain with the local chapter. Membership year is from July to June.

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